

West Chester, PA— Continuing his efforts to advocate for individuals with special needs, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) met with local legislators and representatives of The Arc of Chester County, an organization providing services for those with cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. He visited the facility and spoke with members of the organization regarding the upcoming legislative season at the organization's Legislative Breakfast in West Chester. The Arc is part of a national organization that advances public policy advocacy, family training, public awareness, and community resources for the developmentally disabled. —

"I have long been committed to addressing the needs of the developmentally disabled," said Congressman Sestak. "As far back as high school I worked with developmentally disabled students at the Don Guanella School. Since my election, I have worked on a number of bills to provide support for the disabled, and in April held a summit on mental health and developmental disabilities with Rep. Patrick Kennedy at the Elwyn vocational rehabilitation center to support his Mental Health Parity legislation. I also enjoyed participating in the "Walk for Our Kids" fundraiser this year to provide resource books, literature and to support new families of children with Down Syndrome."

Congressman Sestak discussed other important pieces of legislation to developmentally disabled, including the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act, which would create a program to help adults with disabilities to remain independent, employed, and part of their local community; and the Direct Support Professionals Fairness and Security Act, which would take important steps to ensure that direct support professionals, such as home aides and personal care assistants are paid wages and benefits that will allow them to stay in their jobs and provide critical services for the disabled population.

Congressman Sestak has also worked to address the health and welfare needs of the developmentally disabled. He has advocated for additional funding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) that provides medical insurance for low-income children, in addition to opposing cuts for Medicaid funding proposed in the President's FY 2008 budget. Additionally, Congressman Sestak is a co-sponsor of H.R. 493, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of genetic testing of individuals or family members, and keeps insurers from determining health care insurance premiums based on results of genetic tests. The mental health parity legislation he helped pass would require insurers to provide the same level of mental health coverage as they do medical health.

“Education is one of my four pillars – it’s one of my top priorities in Congress,” stated Congressman Sestak. “As a member of the House Education Committee, my focus is on providing every student – particularly those with disabilities – with the best possible education. We must give them the resources necessary to be independent, employed, and active members of the community.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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